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Going from homeless to a homeless advocate

Kim Carter among those sharing ideas at summit

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When Kim Carter sees a homeless woman on the street, she sees herself.

Because that used to be her.

The founder and ambassador of the Time for Change Foundation in San Bernardino talked about her past and her work as a homeless advocate during the 11th annual Homeless Summit, themed "Aspire and Inspire," on Wednesday in Ontario.

"I was savable," said Carter, who is now president of the Center for Housing Advancement and Motivational Projects.

"I still had value. I still had worth in me. It was not over for

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me," Carter added. "And I became a change agent."

Launched in 2002, the Time For Change Foundation has helped more than 1,000 women and children in San Bernardino County achieve self-sufficiency. Carter said the foundation also has reunited 282 children in foster care with their mothers.

This year's summit, hosted by the San Bernardino County Homeless Partnership, brought together homeless service providers from throughout the county for a day of presentations and networking.

In her energetic keynote address, Carter encouraged other homeless advocates to bridge the gap between governmental systems meant to help those in need and the people they're hoping to help.

"The systems do nothing

without us taking it, twisting it and bringing it down to meet the people," Carter said. "The system is going to be in the building, but the homeless folks are outside."

The group also recognized 5th District County Supervisor Josie Gonzales for her efforts to end homelessness in the county. Gonzales, who founded the Interagency Council on Homelessness, stressed the importance of collaboration.

"You all have been aspiring for a very long time, and you've been an inspiration in bringing so many others along with you," Gonzales told the audience. "You truly are the magnets that attract the solution."

The inspiration to do this work can be found in the results, Gonzales said, noting that the county has helped house more than 1,000 veterans, nearly 1,800 families, 4,800 children and 620 chronically homeless individuals.

Gonzales said part of the reason for her focus on homelessness is that the problem is an economic drain on local governments.

Some studies suggest that each homeless person on the street costs taxpayers between \$35,000 and \$125,000 per year in the form of emergency health care, police calls and other costs. By comparison, Gonzales said it costs \$15,000 to \$25,000 to house and provide services to a homeless individual.

"If cities band together and address issues they have in common, there is an efficiency that can be had, a cost savings that can be had, and higher positive outcomes that can be had," Gonzales said.

The partnership, composed of the Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Homeless Provider Network and the county's Office of Homeless Services, has secured more than \$62 million in federal funding for homeless services.